

Ethiopian Americans Council (EAC)

P.O. Box 28597 San Jose CA 95159

Web: www.eacouncil.org

e-mail: ethioamericans@gmail.com



For Immediate Release

November 27, 2007

Democracy Versus Zenawi's Power

The Case of Ethiopian Society and HR 2003

The real prospect of HR 2003 (Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007) becoming a US law is making the Ethiopian ruling party very nervous. Consistent with the nature of an oligarchic regime, it perceives democracy as a threat to its very existence. Thus, its multiple approaches, at home and abroad, to try to quash HR 2003 in the US Senate should come as no surprise to anyone.

In Ethiopia, Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, is attempting to appeal to the nationalistic sentiment of the society by portraying the bill as the United States Congress's attempt to "neo-colonize" Ethiopia. Such a desperate and reckless allegation by a high-level party official might have potentially ignited an anti-American sentiment throughout the country. However, thanks to the ruling party's immense unpopularity, the Minister's political demagoguery will have little or no impact. Such twisted allegations by a high-ranking official of the ruling party show the extent of their willingness to alienate Ethiopian society against the U.S. government to preserve the ruling party's own power.

On a bi-lateral level, Meles Zenawi, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, is exerting pressure on the U.S. State Department to persuade the Senate *not* to consider HR 2003 on the grounds that such a move would jeopardize his regime's collaboration with the United States to combat "terrorism" in the Horn of Africa. So far, he has the sympathetic ear of Jendayi Frazer, US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. But Zenawi's utter failure in Somalia should give Frazer and US policy makers pause for reflection.

Zenawi's military venture in Somalia has displaced millions from their homes, left thousands dead, and has rekindled anti-American sentiment among the devastated populations. To make things worst, the transitional government which Zenawi backed has failed to stabilize the country. Since Zenawi's regime has neither the political will nor the power to remain in Somalia, it wants to pull its military out. Given that the UN secretary-general, Ban Ki moon, has made it clear that UN would not deploy a peacekeeping mission to Somalia, it is safe to say that it is merely a matter of time before the situation in Somalia becomes catastrophic.

Zenawi's regime has become part and parcel of the problem in the Horn of Arica. He has no remaining political leverage to bring the various regional players together to seek political solution. Yet, in spite of his growing liability to the United States, the current administration justifies continued support to his regime. As the post 2005 election in Ethiopia amply demonstrated, the military and financial assistant that Zenawi enjoys from the United States is effectively being used to terrorize civilians throughout Ethiopia.

US House Support for HR 2003

In the words of Congressman Chris Smith:

"The war on terror is very important, but no regime that terrorizes its own citizens can be a reliable ally in the war on terror. Terrorism isn't just a military issue. It is also a human rights issue.

Terrorists come from countries where their governments fail to respect their human rights. In promoting human rights in Ethiopia, we are attacking terrorism at its roots.”

Such logic and clear thinking on the part of Congressmen Christ Smith and Donald Payne helped the House representatives to be unified in support of HR 2003.

The bill is now in the Senate, and key members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations have indicated their inclination to endorse the House’s decision when the bill hits Senate Floor next year.

Of course, as long as Mr. Zenawi’s regime has a total monopoly of Ethiopia’s resources, it will continue to intensify its efforts to influence legislation through some of its top hired lobbying firms like DLP Piper (which is run, among others, by the former House Republican majority leader Dick Armey). Fortunately, for all of its influence, the House rejected DLP Piper’s tired argument, and there are reasons to believe that the Senate might do the same.

About HR 2003

HR 2003 is a conduit to establishing long-term political stability in Ethiopia.

It proposes to aid the democratization process by calling for a dialogue between the ruling party and opposition groups, for the release of political prisoners, for broader civic engagement in the electoral process, for a vibrant free press, and, for an independent, efficient judiciary.

In the ever volatile Horn of Africa, the mostly nomadic Somalis and farmers in Ethiopia need hope, not bullets. Zenawi’s belligerent approaches to commandeering political problems which in fact require political solutions, put the Horn of Africa on the verge of social disintegration. Such unwelcome political instability creates a fertile ground for terrorism to take root.

HR 2003 can help facilitate a conducive environment to bring political stability in Ethiopia as well as in the entire region. Only a politically stable Ethiopia can effectively influence a positive outcome in that area. It is a high time for the United States to start engaging the citizens of the region rather than backing corrupt opportunists.

The Ethiopian Americans Council